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United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Foot-and-Mouth Disease Information for Airlines

Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is a severe, highly communicable viral disease of cattle, swine, and other cloven-hooved animals. It does not affect humans, but can be spread by animals, people, or materials that bring the virus into physical contact with susceptible animals. FMD is characterized by fever and blister-like lesions and erosions on the tongue and lips, in the mouth, on the teats, and between the hooves of affected animals. Many animals recover from FMD infection, but the disease leaves them debilitated. It also causes severe losses in the production of meat and milk.

Due to its ability to spread rapidly, and because it has grave economic as well as clinical consequences, FMD is one of the animal diseases that livestock owners dread most. The FMD virus can persist in contaminated fodder and the environment for up to one month, depending on the temperature and other conditions. In addition, there are seven separate types of the FMD virus, as well as many subtypes of the virus. Immunity to one type does not protect an animal against other types.

There has not been an FMD outbreak in the United States since 1929. FMD, however, is considered widespread around the rest of the world. To protect the U.S. livestock industry, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits the entry of animals and animal byproducts into the United States from areas known to be infected with FMD. USDA, as a further precaution, has also temporarily banned imports of animals and animal products from the European Union due to the recent detection of FMD in France.

How Airlines Can Help

Airline employees and flight crew can play a critical role in protecting the United States from FMD by:

- Making in-flight announcements on international flights to raise passenger awareness about the dangers of FMD. USDA has provided brief text for these announcements.
- Reminding airline passengers and crew that they must declare visits to farms or livestock facilities on their Customs declaration forms. They must also report all food items and other material of plant or animal origin in their possession. USDA officers inspect passenger baggage for undeclared agricultural products. Failure to declare any items may result in delays and fines of up to \$1,000.
- Reminding personnel of airline catering and cleaning companies to follow USDA regulations in the handling and disposal of off-loaded garbage from international flights. Regulatory requirements are spelled out in the terms of USDA compliance agreements with these companies. Violation of Federal regulations can result in a criminal penalty of up to a \$5,000 fine, a year in jail, or both, or a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 per violation.

Additional Information

For information on USDA's action to protect U.S. agriculture from FMD, access the USDA website at www.usda.gov. Information is given on the types of products prohibited entry into the United States and USDA's other FMD safeguarding efforts.

USDA is also establishing a toll-free hotline with a recorded message about our heightened awareness concerning FMD and international travelers. Hundreds of people will be able to access the information simultaneously. Callers will be referred to the USDA website for more information. USDA will be distributing the telephone number as soon as it is available.

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